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Summary record of the 26th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 7 November 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Almahmoud (Vice-Chair) ..... (United Arab Emirates)
later: Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Chair) ..... (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

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In the absence of Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), Mr. Almahmoud (United Arab Emirates), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 54: Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/72/296, A/72/314, A/72/538, A/72/539, A/72/564 and A/72/565)

1. **Mr. Sabarullah Khan** (Sri Lanka), speaking as Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories and introducing the report of the Special Committee (A/72/539), said that in the absence of an Israeli Government response to the Special Committee's request to access the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Special Committee had held consultations with Member States in Geneva, followed by a visit to Amman in July 2017. There, civil society representatives, victims and witnesses of Israeli violations as well as Palestinian and United Nations officials had highlighted the growing sense of hopelessness among Palestinians and the steadily deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation after fifty years of Israeli occupation.

2. The foremost concern raised during the Special Committee's mission to Amman was the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza caused by a decade-long blockade imposed by Israel and which had been largely overlooked by the international community. The subsequent electricity crisis starting in April 2017 continued to have a negative impact on Gaza residents, who often had access to only two hours of electricity per day and faced cuts to essential hospital services, as well as significantly reduced access to piped water, desalination and sewage treatment services. Concerns had also been expressed about the apparent increase in the denial or delayed issuance of permits to Gaza residents seeking outside medical treatment, denials which had led to the death of a 17-year-old boy with a congenital heart condition. Permits were also increasingly being denied to humanitarian workers, thus creating obstacles to their work.

3. Settlement activity was continuing in both the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan. Between 2015 and 2016, there had been a 40 per cent increase in the construction of housing units in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, including the first new settlement erected in the West Bank since the 1990s. The increase in settlement activity coupled with the passage, in 2017, of what was referred to as the "regularization bill", which retroactively legalized "outposts" built on private Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank which had previously been unrecognized under Israeli domestic law, demonstrated a continued lack of compliance with international law on the part of Israel. Settlement activity also had a detrimental impact on the human rights of Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, because it was accompanied by the construction of roads that were accessible only to Israelis and often encroached on Palestinian wells and agricultural lands. The international community must not overlook such disruptions to Palestinian access to employment, education and family.

4. The Special Committee had heard about many environmental concerns, including limited access to shrinking water supplies, the increasing salinity of Gaza water and the dumping of wastewater in the occupied West Bank. Continued construction of the wall not only prevented farmers from accessing their lands but also resulted in the confiscation of said Palestinian lands; in some cases, construction had altered the fundamental landscape by disrupting water routes and natural habitats.

5. The report also noted that 2016 had seen the highest rate of home demolitions, both punitive and administrative, since the United Nations had begun collecting such data in 2009. As the occupying Power, Israel must administer the Palestinian Territory for the benefit of the protected Palestinian population; there were only an extremely limited number of cases that could lawfully warrant the destruction of private property. Concerns had also been expressed about the demolition of 79 donor-funded humanitarian structures in 2017 alone, actions which went against the obligation of the occupying Power to provide for the humanitarian needs of the protected population. The report also contained an update on the situation of the vulnerable Bedouin communities in Area C that were at risk of forcible transfer, especially the Khan al-Ahmar Abu Al Helu community. In February 2017, Israel had issued 44 stop-work orders for all existing structures in that community, which had subsequently been converted into demolition orders that threatened the existence of the whole community. The Special Committee emphasized the need to rescind all demolition, eviction and seizure orders that would likely lead to the forcible transfer of Bedouin communities in the occupied West Bank and therefore negatively affect their pastoralist lifestyle.

6. According to information received by the Special Committee, Israel had implemented policies that sought to alter the demographic balance in East Jerusalem. Palestinians living there faced increasing restrictions

and regulations regarding their very presence, including the need to frequently provide extensive documentation to maintain their residency status in East Jerusalem. East Jerusalem residents who married Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza faced additional challenges and infringements on family life. The Special Committee had also been told that 2017 had seen the first instance of punitive residency revocation, in which the family members of individuals involved in a deplorable attack had been punished.

7. As many as 1,500 Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons had initiated a mass hunger strike in 2017 to call for an end to the use of administrative detention. An estimated 500 Palestinians were still being held on administrative detention orders that could be renewed indefinitely, without charge or trial. As at July 2017, 330 Palestinian children were also being held in Israeli prisons. The Special Committee had been disturbed to hear reports of the ill treatment of children during arrest and detention, including physical abuse, blindfolding, the use of hand and leg ties and the practice of night-time arrests made without the presence of parents or guardians. Israel must ensure that detainees, in particular children, were treated in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian law; the occupying Power must also end its practice of administrative detention.

8. During the reporting period, incidents of excessive use of force by Israeli security forces against protestors or alleged attackers, including the use of live ammunition against demonstrators, had resulted in 269 Palestinian deaths, only 24 of which had been investigated. In fact, the excessive use of deadly force was rarely investigated and resulted in an atmosphere of impunity, which only served to fuel the cycle of violence. Israeli forces must exercise restraint and respond proportionately to perceived threats, while minimizing damage or injury and respecting human life. The Special Committee had heard worrying testimony from civil society organizations reporting that they faced increasing harassment, including the repeated interrogation and arrest of activists, in part due to the tracking of activists on social media. The space in which civil society actors could promote and protect human rights in Gaza was rapidly shrinking.

9. The stalled peace process, ongoing blockade and worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, as well as the excessive use of force employed by Israeli security forces, attacks and restrictions on civil society and a generalized lack of economic opportunities for many individuals in the Occupied Palestinian Territories had produced an atmosphere of hopelessness and despair, even among the very young. Israel and the international community should take note of the reports of ongoing violations and ensure that accountability, an essential component of security and sustainable peace, was prioritized with a view to ending the cycle of violence and renewing the peace process.

10. **Mr. Mokhiber** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)), introducing the reports of the Secretary-General under the current agenda item, said that the report on the work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/72/296) outlined the activities undertaken by the Special Committee and the United Nations Secretariat, including the Department of Public Information, in support of the Special Committee's work.

11. The report of the Secretary-General on the applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the other occupied Arab territories (A/72/314) summarized the response received to a request for information about the steps taken concerning the implementation of the resolution; a response had been received from the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations.

12. The report of the Secretary-General on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan (A/72/564) covered the period from 1 June 2016 to 31 May 2017 and was based on monitoring and other information-gathering activities carried out by OHCHR, as well as information from other United Nations entities, Israeli and Palestinian non-governmental organizations and media sources. The report provided an update on settlement-related activities in the territories occupied by Israeli since 1967, as well as in-depth cases studies documenting forced evictions faced by two Bedouin and herder communities in Area C. The report had concluded that Israeli settlement-related activities, and in particular a coercive environment and the risk of forcible transfer in some areas, were the cause of numerous human rights violations and humanitarian needs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Israeli authorities should cease all activities designed to create a coercive environment, halt and reverse all settlement development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including occupied East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan, and discontinue support for private settler organization initiatives aimed at the seizure of Palestinian properties and the forced eviction of their residents.

13. The report of the Secretary-General on Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (A/72/565) covered the same period as the report on Israeli settlements (A/72/564) and was based on the same monitoring and information-gathering activities. It focused on several ongoing patterns of human rights violations committed by Israeli, including those related to the unlawful use of force, detention, collective punishment practices, the situation of human rights defenders and the continuing lack of accountability for violations of international human rights law. A major driver of those ongoing violations was a lack of accountability. A human rights-based approach assessed whether, in practice, accountability was achieved with existing mechanisms, as the existence alone of such mechanisms and processes was insufficient. The lack of Israeli accountability was not only contrary to international legal obligations, but also fuelled resentment and spurred further conflict.

14. The report of the Secretary-General on the occupied Syrian Golan (A/72/538) summarized the responses received to a request for information about any steps taken or envisaged concerning the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/99. Responses had been received from the Permanent Missions of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Denmark, Iraq, Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and from the Secretariat of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

15. *Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) took the Chair.*

16. **Mr. González** (Nicaragua) requested further details on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the impact that the illegal Israeli blockade was having on the civilian population, especially as regards health and sanitation.

17. **Mr. Mounzer** (Syrian Arab Republic) asked why the Secretary-General's report on the occupied Syrian Golan (A/72/538) did not reflect the position of the Secretary-General and the Secretariat regarding Israeli violations in the occupied Syrian Golan and the suffering of Syrian citizens after more than 50 years of occupation. His delegation wondered whether the role of the Secretary-General was limited to transmitting the information received from Permanent Missions.

18. **Mr. Wardhana** (Indonesia) requested further information on the conditions endured by Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons, especially children. Tackling impunity must be the highest priority of the United Nations and he therefore asked to what extent the existing system was effective in investigating the human rights violations committed against Palestinian civilians and how the international community could ensure that accountability acted as a deterrent for future violations.

19. **Mr. Sabarullah Khan** (Sri Lanka), speaking as Chair of the Special Committee, said that nearly all briefings on Gaza had highlighted the dire humanitarian crisis and economic stagnation caused by the Israeli blockade and escalation of hostilities, which had been further compounded by the electricity crisis. Israel must fulfil its humanitarian obligations as the occupying Power and permit the entry and exit of people and goods to and from Gaza. The humanitarian situation in Gaza was a human-made crisis which predated the most recent electricity shortage. The economic stagnation, including extremely high unemployment rates, was contributing to a growing sense of hopelessness, and the electricity crisis was placing an additional burden on the already strained health and sanitation infrastructure. Without power, sewage treatment plans could not function, and as much as 110 million litres of untreated sewage were being dumped into the sea every day.

20. More than 1,500 Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons had participated in the mass hunger strike called to protest against the continued practice of administrative detention. Of the 330 Palestinian children under the age of 14 held in Israeli prisons as at May 2017, 3 were under administrative detention orders. Concerns had been expressed to the Special Committee about legislation permitting the detention of children under the age of 14, and it had received accounts of many violations of the right to due process for children. One particularly troubling case involved a 17 year-old who had been arrested at night in December 2016, blindfolded, beaten and taken to a military detention camp from his home.

21. **Mr. Mokhiber** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) said that he had noted the concern that the report on the occupied Syrian Golan (A/72/538) did not contain sufficient information on the position of the Secretariat with regard to the suffering of the Syrian people in the Golan. OHCHR had received a response from only one Secretariat entity, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

22. With regard to prison conditions for Palestinian detainees, the approximately 500 Palestinians held under administrative detention orders marked the highest number in nine years. The hunger strike that had begun in May 2017 and lasted some 40 days had called for an end to arbitrary detention, as well as for increased family visits and improved access to health care. Israel must go beyond negotiating agreements to end hunger

strikes and address the human rights grievances underpinning such protests. The Israeli system of administrative detention was inconsistent with international human rights and humanitarian law and should be abolished. Detainees held under administrative detention must be promptly charged or released without delay. Israel had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulated that the detention of children should be a measure of last resort and that detention should be focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment. It was therefore concerning that Israel continued to arrest children and that its legislation had been reformed to legalize custodial sentences for children as young as 12. With regard to the issue of impunity, the system of international mechanisms that addressed human rights violations was an important means for the international community to push back and insist on accountability.

23. **Mr. Arcia Vivas** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that his delegation condemned the criminal actions of the occupying Power against innocent Palestinians, including collective punishment and its illegal colonialist expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and in the occupied Syrian Golan. It was incredible that Israel was able to commit human rights violations with impunity, and his delegation wondered how conversations with the occupying Power had unfolded when the Special Committee had contacted it for information, especially when the issue of the country's failure to comply with various United Nations resolutions had been raised. With regard to the Palestinian children unjustly held in Israeli prisons, his delegation asked whether those children could be freed in the near future and requested further information on the physical and psychological impact of their ill treatment.

24. **Mr. Bamya** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the Special Committee's report (A/72/539) dissected the broad arsenal of Israeli actions deployed in pursuit of its long-standing policy of displacing and replacing the Palestinian people: that is, of annexing the maximum area of land with the minimum number of Palestinians on it. His delegation asked for further information regarding the policy of creating a coercive environment as had been mentioned in the report, and its impact on Palestinians.

25. With regard to administrative detention, it was important not to call for either the prosecution or the release of individuals under administrative detention: the international community must call solely for their immediate release. Over the course of 50 years, 800,000 Palestinians had been arrested, and the conviction rate for Palestinian defendants in Israeli courts was 90 to 99.7 per cent, according to the United States Department of State. As Israeli military courts failed all human rights standards, they could not be called upon to prosecute Palestinians currently held under administrative detention, which included children, elected representatives, academics, human rights defenders, journalists and mere bystanders.

26. **Mr. Bouassila** (Algeria), referring to the violations committed every day by Israel against the Palestinians and other Arab peoples in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention, said that his delegation would like further information from OHCHR on the issue of impunity. In the absence of any sort of protection for the Palestinians and other Arabs suffering under the Israeli occupation, his delegation asked how the international community, including the Security Council, could protect the Palestinian people.

27. **Mr. Sabarullah Khan** (Sri Lanka), speaking as Chair of the Special Committee, said that, as in previous years, the Government of Israel had not granted the Special Committee access to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and other Arab territories occupied since 1967. In fact, the Special Committee had never received a response from the Israeli Government and had therefore been unable to hold consultations with the relevant Israeli authorities.

28. Concerning the settlement expansion, many submissions to the Special Committee had expressed concern regarding the recent acceleration in settlement expansion in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which was considered illegal under international law. The expansion of the settlements had additional detrimental impacts on the human rights of Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, often disrupting the access of Palestinians to their jobs, schools and families. According to one analysis presented to the Special Committee, the accelerated construction of settlements, together with legislative efforts such as the "regularization bill" passed in February 2017, indicated the intention of Israel to annex the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in direct violation of international law.

29. **Mr. Mokhiber** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) said that it was regrettable that many of the recommendations made by a wide range of human rights bodies had yet to be implemented. Over the previous year, the persistent failure to respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law had been both a symptom and a driver of conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, where despair continued to grow after fifty years of occupation with no hope of an end in

sight. Palestinians still bore the brunt of discriminatory and punitive Israeli practices on a daily basis, specifically as a result of an alarming lack of accountability. During the period covered by the report, the response of Israeli security forces to alleged attacks had appeared to constitute the excessive use of force, in certain cases to the extent that extrajudicial executions and wilful killings were strongly suspected. Of the 269 Palestinians killed by Israeli forces between October 2015 and March 2017, 176 had been alleged to have been carrying out attacks against Israelis; a 16-year-old boy had been killed for allegedly urging others to throw stones at an Israeli security tower. Only one of those killings had led to the trial and conviction of the soldier, whose already lenient sentence had subsequently been reduced, largely owing to media attention and the existence of video footage of the incident. For Palestinians, the loss of dignity and continued humiliation of life under occupation was exacerbated by the pervasive lack of accountability for alleged violations of international law, feeding the cycle of violence and compromising chances for sustainable peace and security while also violating international human rights standards. Tackling impunity must therefore be afforded the highest priority. Lastly, the practice of placing children in detention was extremely alarming and contravened international human rights standards.

30. **Mr. Bamya** (Observer for the State of Palestine), welcoming the report of the Special Committee (A/72/539) but expressing concern at the delays in the report's issuance, said that his delegation rejected any attempts to portray as one-sided or Israel-bashing the reports before the Committee or other relevant reports that depicted the critical human rights and protection crisis in Palestine accurately. On the contrary, those reports examined the situation through the clear lens of international law and, if anything, the reports alone could not accurately depict the grim reality of Palestinian life under the abhorrent, illegal foreign military occupation, which must be seen to be believed. Absurd attempts to portray the aggressor as victim had no place in civilized discourse and should not be permitted or appeased. Doing so would only cause the Israeli Government to continue to act with impunity.

31. In 2017, the Palestinian people were marking several sombre anniversaries, including the one hundredth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, the seventieth anniversary of the Nakba and the fiftieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation, which persisted with no end in sight. Neither sympathetic words nor humanitarian aid would suffice in isolation to rectify an injustice that had, for far too long, inflicted untold human suffering, undermined the credibility of international institutions and hindered regional peace and stability. Only a solution that restored long-denied rights to the Palestinian people, including Palestine refugees, could lead to Palestinian-Israeli peace and close that dark chapter in history. His delegation therefore reiterated its urgent call for international obligations to resolve all aspects of the question of Palestine to be upheld, in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Israeli occupation, which had deprived generations of Palestinians of freedom, rights and dignity and driven them to despair, must be brought to an end. The Special Committee had aptly described the loss of hope among Palestinians, particularly the young, in the face of a steadily deteriorating humanitarian situation, years of stalled peace negotiations and no recourse to seek accountability for the crimes perpetrated against them.

32. Israel, the occupying Power, persisted in exploiting the international paralysis and absence of political will to end the tragedy by continuing to perpetrate systematic, blatant violations of international law in Occupied Palestine with total impunity. Despite the explicit demand set out in Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) for the immediate and complete cessation of settlement activities, Israeli colonization in Occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, continued to fragment the Territory, diminishing the viability of the two-State solution within the pre-1967 borders. Israel had escalated its activities fourfold in 2017, underscoring its current Government's brazen commitment to the illegal colonization drive. Those activities included expansion and construction of Israeli settlements and the wall; the transfer of more Israeli settlers to Occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, with official support and accompanied by acts of violence against Palestinian civilians and property; confiscation of Palestinian land and demolition of Palestinian homes; forcible displacement of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem and continual threats of forced transfers, with Bedouin refugee communities at particular risk; exploitation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory's natural resources, especially water; and constant attempts and threats by Israeli officials to annex Palestinian land. The extensive list of human rights violations, many of which amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity, was compounded by the violence and terror perpetrated against Palestinian civilians by the occupying Power and its illegal settlers, including a shoot-to-kill policy against civilians even when no threat was imminent.

33. Occupying soldiers and extremist settlers routinely intimidated and humiliated Palestinian

civilians, intensifying the coercive environment inflicted on the population. Moreover, often deadly Israeli military raids on Palestinian cities, towns, villages and refugee camps persisted, as did the arrest and detention of thousands of civilians, including children. Administrative detention without charge was renewed in many cases for months and even years, and Palestinian prisoners and detainees, including hunger strikers, were jailed in deplorable conditions, abused and, in certain instances, subjected to solitary confinement and torture.

34. Israeli incitement and inflammatory rhetoric regarding holy sites in Occupied East Jerusalem and targeting the Palestinian people and their leadership continued unabated, stoking tensions and dangerously inflaming religious sentiments surrounding the historic status quo of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The crisis in July 2017 attested to the real risk of further destabilization of the already delicate situation. The occupying Power continued to pursue, through its racist legislative schemes aimed at further dispossessing the Palestinian people and facilitating the de facto annexation of its land, a twisting of the legislative process to legitimize clearly ill-intentioned and unlawful actions.

35. Collective punishment measures — the vilest of them the illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip — affected every aspect of Palestinian life. Deplorable socioeconomic conditions and the humanitarian and protection crisis inflicted on Gaza had isolated and impoverished 2 million Palestinians over the previous decade. Furthermore, the occupying Power's repeated and devastating military aggressions had destroyed homes, businesses and vital civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, power plants and sanitation systems. Poverty and food insecurity were rampant in Gaza, and the unemployment rate was among the highest in the world. Fuel and electricity shortages and collapsing health and sanitation infrastructure continued to adversely affect the well-being of the population. The purely human-made crisis in Gaza had led conditions in the territory to deteriorate more rapidly than previously anticipated.

36. The previous year had reconfirmed that Israel remained intent on pursuing its colonial, expansionist agenda at the expense of its international legal obligations. It was also abundantly clear that the occupation was synonymous with and depended on violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people, including their *erga omnes* right to self-determination. In that regard, the conclusions on the occupation's legality set out in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 were timely and required follow-up.

37. Lack of accountability had unquestionably emboldened the occupying Power's illegal behaviour and fostered a deplorable culture of impunity and contempt for the international community. Israel continued to intimidate anyone seeking accountability, including States that stood on principle, United Nations entities advocating for Palestinian rights, human rights defenders and civil society activists. In the absence of accountability, the status quo of failure to redress a grave injustice would only prolong the conflict, resulting in greater human suffering. Despite the overwhelming international support for Palestinian rights, such impunity had allowed Israel to persist in denying those rights, further undermining prospects for peace.

38. His delegation reiterated its appeal to the international community to ensure accountability by compelling compliance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations, the Geneva Conventions and human rights instruments and ending the culture of impunity that Israel had been allowed to enjoy for far too long. United Nations bodies, States and international organizations had clear responsibilities; each must ask itself whether it had done everything in its power to end Palestinian dispossession and Israeli occupation and to bring about peace for all the region's peoples. Individual and collective action were vital to prevent additional violations, obtain justice for generations of Palestinian victims and spare future generations from oppression, subjugation and forced exile. Such action would make Palestinian-Israeli peace and coexistence possible. Only an end to Israeli colonization of Palestinian land and all other illegal practices against the Palestinian people could stem the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, make the two-State solution viable again and create the conditions for achieving a just and lasting solution based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, enabling the Palestinian people to realize their aspiration to live in freedom, peace and dignity in an independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

39. **Mr. Suárez Moreno** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that the Movement regretted the worsening human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, and was deeply concerned that Israel had prevented the Special Committee from holding consultations with the relevant Israeli authorities and from gaining access to the occupied territories in line with its mandate. The

Movement condemned the Israeli Government's obstinate settlement of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which was a grave violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and various United Nations resolutions, and constituted the main obstacle to peace. The Special Committee's disturbing findings, which showed that Israel continued to violate the fundamental human rights and dignity of the Palestinian people and other Arabs living under occupation, were a matter of serious concern.

40. Israel had used several purportedly legal and administrative measures to expand its control over more Palestinian territory, including the declaration of "State land" and seizure of Palestinian land for archaeological and recreational activities. Furthermore, the illegal exploitation of the natural resources of Palestine denied the right of Palestinians to sovereignty over their natural resources, including water and energy resources, and their right to development.

41. With reference to the Syrian Golan, the Movement reaffirmed that all unlawful actions perpetrated by Israel, as well as recent statements by that country claiming sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan, constituted clear violations of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant resolutions, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981). Israel must abide by that resolution and withdraw completely to the borders of 4 June 1967. At its recent Summit, the Movement had emphasized, inter alia, the urgency of achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-State solution within the pre-1967 borders. All parties concerned must make a concerted effort to that end. The Movement reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to the immediate restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination in an independent and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to a just solution for the Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

42. **Mr. Al-Mouallimi** (Saudi Arabia), speaking on behalf of the League of Arab States, said that the League welcomed the recent announcement of Palestinian national reconciliation and commended Egypt for sponsoring the negotiation process. Israel, the occupying Power, continued to perpetrate countless acts of aggression against the Palestinian people, using disproportionate force and detaining and torturing thousands of Palestinians, including women and children.

43. A comprehensive and lasting peace was the strategic Arab aim articulated in the Arab Peace Initiative, which called for full withdrawal by Israel from all occupied Arab territories; the establishment of an independent, sovereign State of Palestine within 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital; and a just settlement of all final status issues, including the refugee question.

44. The League denounced the escalation of violent acts perpetrated by Israeli occupation authorities against the innocent Palestinian people. Flaunting their disregard of United Nations resolutions, occupation forces continued to expand settlement construction, demolish homes, seize Palestinian land and persist in their attempts to erase the Arab identity. By pursuing its aggressive settlement policy, Israel continued to imperil the chances of a historic reconciliation and the viability of the peace process. Settlements, a flagrant violation of international law, constituted the fundamental obstacle to achieving a just settlement of the conflict on the basis of the two-State solution.

45. In addition to committing countless violations, Israeli occupation authorities failed to fulfil their duty to protect the Palestinian people and disregarded the resolution adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) underscoring the integrity, authenticity and cultural heritage of Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif as a Muslim holy site of worship. In its Amman Declaration of March 2017, the League of Arab States had called on the international community to implement all United Nations resolutions concerning settlements, including Security Council resolution 2334 (2017) and rejected all measures taken by Israel to alter the legal and historical status of Islamic and Christian holy sites in occupied Jerusalem and the closing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque to worshipers. The Declaration also urged States to refrain from transferring their embassies to Jerusalem and reiterated the need to implement the UNESCO resolution of October 2016 concerning Israeli violations against the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

46. Seventy years on from the Palestinian Nakba, after fifty years of occupation and with the blockade of the Gaza Strip entering its eleventh year, he wondered how much longer those grave injustices could persist. Against the grim backdrop of international inaction, the League would maintain its unstinting support for the steadfast Palestinian people until its inalienable rights were upheld. To conclude, he recalled the Organization's legal and moral responsibility to the Palestinian people and warned of the perils of an escalation whose impact could engulf the entire region and the wider world.

47. **Mr. Dabouis** (Observer for the European Union) said that the European Union's commitment to achieving a negotiated two-State solution remained the

cornerstone of its Middle East policy and was the only way to bring about lasting peace and security. The European Union and its 28 member States would therefore continue to speak out against developments that undermined the two-State solution or the peace process. One such threat to the peace process was the deplorable, illegal settlement policy pursued by Israel at the expense of the Palestinian people's fulfilment of their unconditional right to self-determination, including the possibility of establishing a sovereign State. The international community would not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed to by the parties through negotiations.

48. The European Union and its member States were deeply concerned at the continuing cycle of violence in recent months and condemned the terror attacks and violence from all sides. In order to remedy the already dire and steadily deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, the blockade must be lifted and all crossing points opened while addressing the legitimate security concerns of Israel. The European Union welcomed the agreement signed in Cairo in October 2017 and the continuing engagement of Egypt. That agreement, if implemented, could contribute to achieving the goal of Palestinian unity under a single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian Authority on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization platform and the Quartet principles, and in accordance with existing agreements. The unsustainable situation in Gaza and recent tensions in East Jerusalem underscored the need for a political solution. The European Union would continue to work with the parties and with all partners to promote a return to a meaningful peace process leading to a negotiated two-State solution and a sustainable peace.

49. As part of their bilateral relationship, the European Union and Israel engaged in regular dialogues on human rights protection. The European Union remained concerned about the extensive recourse by Israel to administrative detention without formal charges, and particularly the high number of Palestinian children held in detention and continuing reports of ill treatment during the arrest, transfer and interrogation of child detainees in the West Bank. Israel should continue cooperating with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to ensure that gaps between policy and practice were bridged and that the rights of children in Israeli military custody were upheld at all times, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Lastly, Israel must resume full cooperation with OHCHR and with the Human Rights Council and its special procedures.

50. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his Government was seriously concerned at the appalling accounts in various reports of the Israeli regime's treatment of the innocent Palestinian people. The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemned the continued illegal settlement expansion and land confiscation by the occupying Power in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in the occupied Syrian Golan, which violated international law. The expansion of settlements deprived Palestinians of their lands and property and denied them access to essential services. In addition, they were subjected to violence, trespassing, harassment and intimidation by Israeli settlers. The land and sea blockade of the Gaza Strip, which had entered its eleventh year of devastating repercussions on the civilian population, must be lifted, and all crossings must be opened. Furthermore, all collective punishment measures, including restrictions on freedom of movement across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, demolition of homes, residency revocations, closure of towns and delays in returning bodies for burial, must be ended.

51. With reference to the Syrian Golan, his Government reaffirmed that the discriminatory and unlawful actions committed by Israel, including the presence of the Israeli regime's army bases in and around Syrian residential and civilian areas and the construction and expansion of settlements constituted a flagrant violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Islamic Republic of Iran urged the international community to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli regime to withdraw completely from all occupied Arab lands, including the Palestinian territory. He emphasized that the international community must uphold its political and legal responsibilities to end the occupation of all Arab lands and reaffirmed his Government's unwavering support for the Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle to end the occupation and exercise their right to self-determination.

52. **Mr. Al-Hamadi** (Qatar) said that Israeli human rights abuses against Palestinians and other Arabs in territories occupied by Israel included the indiscriminate use of force, extrajudicial executions, unlawful arrest and detention of Palestinians and collective punishment measures, in violation of international humanitarian law. In addition, resources that rightfully belonged to Palestinians were being exploited illegally.

53. The Israeli occupation of the previous half-century ranked among the harshest forms of oppression. The conditions for reviving the political process must be created in order to reach a negotiated solution of the

question of Palestine, with a view to attaining a just, lasting, comprehensive peace on the basis of the two-State solution, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, establishing an independent, sovereign, viable State of Palestine within 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, and upholding the Palestinian people's inalienable rights. Qatar therefore renewed its call to implement the resolutions adopted at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly and compel Israel to comply with its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which applied to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and other Arab lands occupied by Israel since 1967. In that connection, the Secretary-General's report on Israeli settlements (A/72/564) had called on Israeli authorities to halt the construction and expansion of settlements, characterizing the forced evictions, seizure of property and restricted access to services those activities entailed as a flagrant violation of international law and of the human rights of Palestinians. Settlement activity had escalated over the previous year and had also hindered access to the West Bank.

54. Attempts to erase the Arab character and demographic composition of Jerusalem and to infringe the sanctity of its Islamic and Christian sites, particularly the Haram al-Sharif, posed a particular threat. Nevertheless, Israel persisted in inflaming the sentiments of Arabs and Muslims around the world by proceeding with its dangerous, illegal escalation aimed at Judaizing and dividing Jerusalem in time and space. Qatar condemned all attacks on worshipers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque as violations of their right to worship freely. As for the Gaza Strip, the humanitarian and economic situation there remained critical as a result of the blockade against the territory, a measure that amounted to collective punishment of the civilian population. The recent conclusion of a reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas and the establishment of a Palestinian national unity Government in Gaza heralded a new dawn of unity and friendship for the Palestinian people.

55. His delegation repudiated the illegal Israeli practices in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan. The occupying Power's decision to impose its jurisdiction and administration on the Golan was null and void. In closing, he reiterated his Government's support for and solidarity with the Palestinians and other Arabs enduring illegal Israeli occupation.

56. **Ms. Scott** (Namibia) said that, 50 years on, Israel continued to commit human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory with apparent impunity. Her delegation was deeply concerned at the human rights situation in the Territory, which had deteriorated further as Israel accelerated its illegal settlement activity, and called on Israel to return to the borders agreed in 1967. The destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure undermined the contiguity of Palestinian land and the viability of a two-State solution. Moreover, the situation in Gaza, where the effects of a ten-year illegal blockade were compounded by an ongoing electricity crisis, was abhorrent and unsustainable.

57. The reconciliation agreement signed by the Palestinian Authority and Hamas in October 2017 was encouraging, and Namibia welcomed the steps already taken to implement the agreement, including the transfer from Hamas to the Palestinian Authority of control over the Gaza border crossing. However, her delegation remained concerned at the grim conditions endured by Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons and at the number of Palestinians held without charge or trial, the arrest and detention of children under the age of 18, and the apparent apartheid policies under which certain services, including roads, were mandatorily separated between Israelis and Palestinians.

58. Namibia remained committed to the cause of the Palestinian people and their struggle to exercise their inalienable right to establish an independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel should cease settlement construction and the destruction of Palestinian homes and should resume negotiations with a view to reaching a two-State solution, which was the only viable route to peace in Israel, Palestine and the wider Middle East.

59. **Mr. Mounzer** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation had hoped that the Secretary-General's report on the occupied Syrian Golan (A/72/538) would have been more comprehensive, reflecting the position of the Secretariat and the Secretary-General instead of merely relaying the information already presented by the Syrian Arab Republic and other Member States.

60. The Israeli occupation of Arab territories and its impact on regional stability had reached a critical stage owing to the international community's deliberate failure to compel Israel to end its occupation, its egregious violations of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and its policy of settlement and displacement, which had reached an unprecedented pace and was enforced through repeated acts of violence and massacre. The terrible crimes it was committing would not be possible without the backing of certain complicit States which made excuses for the Israeli Government's actions and therefore shared legal responsibility for those acts.

61. In the Syrian Golan, the Israeli authorities continued to carry out systematic human rights violations that included racial discrimination and arbitrary arrest, including the re-arrest of a Syrian activist for having exposed Israeli support for terrorists in the area of separation in the Syrian Golan. Moreover, Syrian residents of the Golan who resisted the occupation — a right protected under international law — were arrested and sentenced to long prison terms following a show trial. His delegation urged the international community to make every effort to obtain the release of all Syrian prisoners languishing in occupation prisons. The occupying Power had fined and arrested Syrian citizens of the Golan who had attempted to visit their relatives in their home country. Arab villages were isolated from one another and the infirm who were unable to pay the cost of treatment were barred from traveling to Damascus to receive free medical care. In addition, Israel prohibited the construction of homes by the Syrian citizens of the Golan on their own land and had demolished a number of homes belonging to Syrian citizens, on the pretext that they had not obtained construction licences.

62. Israeli cultural violations included the plunder of archaeological sites by occupation authorities, the imposition of an Israeli educational curriculum on Syrian students and the replacement of many Syrian teachers with Israeli teachers. Violations of the rights of Syrian citizens of the Golan included control of their land and resources as part of a concerted effort to destroy their livelihoods. Occupation authorities had seized over three quarters of the total area of the occupied Syrian Golan, most of it agricultural land, for use by the military. Settlements, toxic waste landfills and wind turbines had been built on the land, and the extraction of oil and other natural resources was under way, in violation of The Hague Regulations, which forbade the exploitation of natural resources in occupied territory. Furthermore, Israeli occupation authorities controlled groundwater resources and stole over 400 million cubic metres of water from the Golan each year, diverting it for use by Israeli settlements and selling it at prices nearing a dollar per cubic metre for irrigation. Syrian citizens of the Golan were also prevented from trading their agricultural products in their home country of Syria.

63. The acts of aggression perpetrated by Israel would foster unprecedented tensions in the region and beyond, particularly as that country's support of the Nusrah Front and other terrorist groups had become public. His delegation therefore urged the United Nations to take immediate action to end the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and have it withdraw to the 1967 borders, in accordance with the relevant resolutions.

64. **Mr. Abbas** (Lebanon) said that the dreadful situation faced by Palestinians, many of whom had been forced to live in perpetual asylum for decades, was aggravated on a daily basis by the illegal and repressive practices of the Israeli occupying Power, as detailed in numerous reports of the Secretary-General. Israel continued to suppress the Palestinian population through the use of unlawful killings, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detention, terrorism, torture, violence and harassment. Illegal settlement activity continued unabated, with the granting of thousands of settlement building permits since the beginning of 2017, and the Israeli policy of offering a multitude of financial, economic and social incentives to settlers continued to erode prospects for the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State.

65. Widespread and arbitrary house demolitions and land seizures had cruelly displaced hundreds of Palestinians in 2017 alone, and successive attacks on Gaza since 2005 had killed thousands of Palestinians and destroyed vast amounts of civilian infrastructure in the Strip; moreover, reconstruction was severely hampered by Israeli restrictions on access to building materials. His delegation called on the international community to compel Israel to lift the illegal blockade on Gaza, which had lasted over a decade and had created a chronic humanitarian and economic crisis in which fuel and electricity were in extremely limited supply, 40 per cent of the population were currently unemployed, and 80 per cent were relying on humanitarian aid to survive. Among the other illegal practices of the Israeli Government in the occupied territories and the occupied Syrian Golan were its exploitation of natural resources, restrictions on access to agricultural land and maritime areas, dumping of hazardous industrial waste on agricultural land, illegal settlement expansion and oppressive campaigns of intimidation and imprisonment.

66. Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories were a direct result of the decades-long occupation and the failure of the international community to compel Israel to abide by international law and United Nations resolutions. The Palestinian people would only be able to enjoy their full human rights and achieve long-term economic and social prosperity with the end of the Israeli occupation and the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and allowing for the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland based on United Nations resolutions and the Madrid principles.

67. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that, 70 years after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (1947), efforts to reach a just solution to the question of Palestine required not only urgent action but also full commitment and clear timelines. It was regrettable that, despite seven decades of efforts to bring about peace and development, the Palestinian people remained unable to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish an independent, sovereign State. The international community had not only a historic, political and moral obligation, but also sufficient legal basis, to restore those rights. His Government supported a two-State solution, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine; thus achieving a situation in which both States could fulfil their security aspirations and live in a state of harmonious co-existence and cooperation. It was also regrettable that the United Nations had not yet granted the State of Palestine its inalienable right to become a fully-fledged Member State of the Organization, with full voting rights.

68. Noting that millions of people remained unable to exercise their legitimate right to development, his delegation called on the international community to guarantee that right for every State through the provision of official development assistance, which was a key factor in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Like all States, Palestine had the right to live in peace and receive assistance and investment to aid its progress towards sustainable development. His delegation also fully supported the work of UNRWA and its efforts to overcome its budget deficit.

69. Peace and stability in the Middle East could only be reached through negotiation and full implementation of United Nations resolutions. Nicaragua would lend its support to all initiatives aimed at achieving peace, unity and cooperation in the region through dialogue and negotiation, and called for increased national, regional and international efforts to support the Palestinian cause. His delegation commended the Government of Egypt on its valuable contribution towards promoting Palestinian unity, and in that connection welcomed the signing on 12 October 2017 of an intra-Palestinian unity agreement, which served as tangible proof of the goodwill and commitment of Palestine to achieving peace and stability.

70. **Ms. Rasheed** (Maldives) said that the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the neighbouring regions had brought decades of terror and suffering to the Arab populations living in those territories, where torture, abuse, injustice, xenophobia and racism had become the norm and the apartheid policies imposed by the ruthless regime of Israel had destroyed families, caused the death of many innocent civilians and forced generations of people to live as refugees in their own land. It was deeply regrettable that all international efforts to resolve the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine had thus far been in vain and that Israel continued to blatantly defy international law and systematically violate the basic human rights of Palestinians.

71. The serious human rights abuses and grave injustices detailed in the Special Committee's report must no longer be tolerated; the international community must take assertive action to compel Israel to guarantee the rights of all Palestinians living under occupation. Israel must dismantle the separation wall in Gaza, immediately halt its illegal expansion of its settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and cease its disgraceful practice of forced evictions of Palestinians from their rightfully owned property in their own homeland.

72. Her delegation condemned the reported physical and psychological abuse of Palestinian children and their arrest in large numbers, including at night, and strongly urged Israel and the international community to take all possible measures to prevent any further human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and end the prolonged illegal occupation. To protect the fundamental freedoms of Palestinians, the Maldives reiterated its call for a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a sovereign and independent Palestine. She reiterated her Government's unwavering support for the quest of Palestine to achieve worldwide political recognition and obtain full membership of the United Nations and other international organizations and specialized agencies.

73. **Ms. Nassrullah** (Iraq) said that the occupying Power's continued aggression against the Palestinian people demonstrated its disregard for international law and United Nations resolutions. Therefore, it was the international community's duty to employ all peaceful means to compel Israel to end its illegal occupation and to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its right to self-determination and establish an internationally recognized State within 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The United Nations should exert pressure on Israel to grant the Special Committee access to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations assisting the Palestinian people.

74. Israel continued to perpetrate illegal acts in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including settlement expansion, violence against Palestinians, confiscation of

land, destruction of homes and property, arbitrary expulsion of and excessive use of force against Palestinians, in addition to its continued blockade of Gaza, ill treatment of prisoners, exploitation of natural resources, deliberate tampering with historic holy sites, and bombing of civilians; such abominable acts were in clear violation of United Nations resolutions, international law and other related international agreements.

75. Her delegation condemned the occupying Power's racist laws, attempts to create new facts on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and brutal arbitrary measures targeting unarmed Palestinian civilians, including systematic campaigns of arrest. It was the duty of the occupying Power to provide judicial safeguards to detainees inside the Territory, in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law. Furthermore, it must abandon its repeated attempts to change the demographic composition of Jerusalem. Her delegation also condemned the occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel since 1967 and the imposition of its laws in the territory since 1981, in violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which had declared the annexation of the Syrian Golan by Israel to be null and void. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was an international conflict in respect of which international humanitarian law — particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocol on non-international conflicts — and international human rights law were applicable. Furthermore, the international community and the United Nations, especially the Security Council, the guardian of international peace and security, had legal and political responsibilities with respect to the conflict, and the General Assembly had adopted dozens of resolutions reaffirming the continuing responsibility of the United Nations to reach final settlement of the question of Palestine.

76. The increasing international recognition of the State of Palestine, with its accession to international organizations and covenants, should be translated into policies aimed at putting an end to arbitrary Israeli practices targeting Palestinians and insisting on the establishment of the State of Palestine. Iraq was a staunch supporter of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to establish an independent State in the Palestinian territories, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Her delegation called for an immediate end to the construction of Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory and compliance with all related United Nations resolutions.

77. **Ms. Alsabah** (Kuwait) said that her delegation commended the Special Committee for its diligent work despite the restrictions imposed upon it by Israel, which refused to cooperate with its investigations. The report of the Special Committee showed that Israel was continuing its illegal practices targeting Palestinians and other inhabitants of the occupied Arab territories, which had severely exacerbated the economic, social, humanitarian and human rights situation. The worsening electricity crisis had affected the already strained health and sanitation infrastructure of Palestine, thus limiting the basic care that hospitals were able to provide. Furthermore, Israel was continuing its systematic settlement expansion in defiance of international law and internationally recognized resolutions; the rate of settlement expansion had increased by 40 per cent since 2015. The actions of the Israeli Government clearly demonstrated its intransigent position and complete disregard for efforts to reach a conclusive political settlement.

78. On the basis of the findings of the report, Kuwait reaffirmed its staunch support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State of Palestine on their land, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to set a deadline for ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. Her delegation called for the release of Palestinian prisoners and the sending of a fact-finding mission to investigate the extent to which conditions of detention in Israeli jails complied with the standards required by international law. Kuwait condemned the illegal blockade against the Gaza Strip, which constituted just one of many Israeli violations of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and the Fourth Geneva Convention. It also called on Israel to swiftly halt its construction of illegal settlements, comply with Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) and fulfil its obligations under the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which had declared the separation wall to be illegal. Her delegation once again called on Israel to withdraw from the Syrian Golan Heights and from occupied Lebanese territory, in accordance with Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and to return to the 1967 borders. Kuwait also supported Palestine's bid to become a full member of the United Nations as part of the Organization's efforts to secure a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The international community must fulfil its responsibility to compel Israel to cooperate with the Special Committee and implement its recommendations, immediately cease its flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, and engage in

initiatives aimed at achieving a just and lasting peaceful solution to the situation in the Middle East.

79. **Mr. Bouassila** (Algeria) said that his delegation condemned the persistent violations of the rights of Palestinians and other Arabs in the occupied territories. Settlement expansion; settler violence; exploitation of natural resources in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the occupied Syrian Golan; administrative detention without trial; excessive use of force; punitive laws; the forced transfer of Bedouin communities; extrajudicial executions; the refusal by Israeli occupation authorities to release the bodies of the Palestinian dead; the blockade of Gaza and the deplorable treatment of prisoners in detention centres were just some of the abuses that were committed with impunity.

80. The refusal by Israel to implement the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and other Arab territories it had occupied since 1967 defied the will of the international community. Urgent action was needed on the part of the international community to protect Palestinians and put an end to the illegal occupation of Arab territories by Israel. Despite the adoption of numerous international resolutions calling for an end to the occupation, illegal Israeli settlement policies on Palestinian land persisted, including the construction of the racist separation wall, the displacement of Palestinian civilians, the imposition of collective punishment and the oppressive blockade of Gaza, in flagrant violation of international law and international humanitarian law. The reality on the ground amounted to a series of human rights violations against the Palestinian people and others under Israeli occupation. The attempt to present the settlement policy in occupied Arab lands as a fait accompli was a flagrant violation of human rights and internationally recognized resolutions. Those Israeli violations remained the foremost obstacle to the two-State solution. The international community had a duty to pressure Israel to end its occupation of all Arab territories and to help the Palestinian people establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital, and exercise full control over its natural resources within the framework of the two-State solution, international law and the Arab Peace Initiative.

81. **Mr. Zambrano Ortiz** (Ecuador) said that 2017 marked 50 years since the beginning of the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, which had been universally condemned by States as a violation of international law and which not only caused irreparable physical and human damage to the Palestinian people, but also undermined prospects for a peaceful solution to the conflict. The current year also marked one century since the publication of the Balfour Declaration and 70 years since the partition of the territory as approved by the General Assembly. Even after such a long period, the Palestinian people continued to suffer relentless human rights abuses and a lack of humanitarian assistance; as a result, the Palestinian people continued to struggle to achieve self-determination and establish their own State as any other people in the world.

82. His delegation urged the Security Council to take tangible action to address the plight of the Palestinian people, paying due regard to the economic and social cost of the occupation and the effects of laws which had long denied Palestinians of their land, citizenship, freedom of expression, participation in politics and the means to live a dignified existence. All settlement expansion policies in the occupied Palestinian territory jeopardized the two-State solution and thus the possibility of lasting peace, and must therefore be rejected. All States bore witness to the humanitarian crisis in which the Palestinian people faced extreme difficulty in gaining access to energy and drinking water, as well as health and sanitation services; the devastation caused by war and the ongoing blockade was rendering certain areas uninhabitable. Urgent action was needed to improve the situation, which was otherwise on course to become one of the world's gravest threats to international peace and security.

83. Ecuador was a proponent of peace, freedom of movement, peaceful resolution of international conflicts and full respect for human rights, including the right to self-determination and the right to live in a legally just society. Moreover, it rejected foreign intervention and the threat or use of force as an instrument of foreign policy, and maintained that borders should function as economic, social and political interchanges, not as areas of conflict; on that basis, Ecuador reiterated its call on the United Nations to mobilize international assistance for the Palestinian people and urged the international community to pool its efforts to secure sufficient, predictable and sustainable resources to allow UNRWA to exercise its mandate.

84. Israel must fully withdraw from the Syrian Golan, pursuant to Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Peace in the Middle East could be achieved only through a definitive solution to the question of Palestine. His delegation reiterated its unstinting support for the Palestinian cause, including the right of Palestinians to exercise self-determination in a State free from foreign intervention, with full respect for the fundamental principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.